



Navigating Home Life

Table of Contents

Combatting COVID-19

- Coronavirus: Combatting Fear
- COVID-19: Managing Anxiety and Fear
- Steps to Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 if You are Sick

Isolation Guide

- Isolation Survival Guide: Caring for Yourself and Your Family

Families at Home

- How can I control my temper around my children?
- Helping Children Cope with Emergencies
- Building Parenting Resilience
- Sibling Rivalry
- Struggling with Anger
- Dealing With the Effects of Social Disruption
- Temper Tantrums and Your Young Child
- When Children and Parents Are Stuck at Home
- Online Resources for Children at Home
- Resources offering online classes, e-learning, multimedia and other materials
- COVID-19 and Domestic Violence Awareness

Staying Active

- Breathing Exercises
- Exercises You Can Do While Sitting at Your Desk
- Exercising Without Equipment
- Home Abs Workouts
- What exercises or techniques can I use to help cope with stress?

Combating COVID-19

Coronavirus: Combatting Fear

As in previous outbreaks of infectious disease, rising fear of the coronavirus has led to an increase in anxiety and fear. Those emotions can, in turn, lead to short tempers, angry outbursts and even aggression. The most important action anyone can take in such situations is to lower the levels of fear and anxiety by listening to credible sources of information, including the local government, trusted media, and health officials. Understanding the facts and heeding sound advice on safety is the best way to remain calm. But another important step is to understand fear and to learn to conquer it.

Consider the following tips for how to cope with fear:

1. **Validate it.** Fear is normal. Everyone experiences fear. By understanding that you are not alone in your feelings, you may be able to better accept it and move on.
2. **Share your fear.** Confronting your fears is difficult enough; doing it alone can be overwhelming. Build a support system by telling those close to you how you feel. They may be able to help you get through rough situations.
3. **Create a safe environment.** Certain tasks, events or settings may be triggering your fear. Stick to familiar, safe places and faces until you are ready to face fear-provoking situations.
4. **Do research.** Do you fear needles? Find others who feel the same way and find out how they overcame their fears. Worried about the coronavirus? Get trusted information from the World Health Organization, the United Nations and similar sources. Understand what if any danger exists; this can help to keep fear within an acceptable range.
5. **Understand your level of control.** No one has control over every aspect of his or her life. Focus on what you do have control over and the strengths you possess. Then, use some of that strength when confronting your fears.
6. **Be patient.** Fear does not leave as suddenly as it appears. Give yourself time to cope, and work on overcoming your fear every day, little by little.

Preventing Fear

While you cannot totally avoid fear, you can take steps to keep your body and mind healthy and balanced. Because stress can aggravate fear, the key is to keep your stress levels low by:

1. Getting enough rest.
2. Exercising regularly.
3. Eating healthy meals on a regular schedule.
4. Avoiding stimulants, such as caffeine and nicotine.
5. Avoiding depressants, such as alcohol or tranquilizers.
6. Staying organized.
7. Avoiding taking on too many projects, commitments and engagements.
8. Doing relaxing exercises, such as breathing, yoga, meditation and muscle-relaxation techniques.

Helping Others Cope with Fear

If a loved one is experiencing fear, here are a few simple steps you can take to help lessen his or her stress and anxiety levels:

1. **Be aware of typical fear reactions.** Sleep disturbances or nightmares, social withdrawal, reverting to childlike behaviors and a lack of focus on work or school can be indicators of fear. If these symptoms are present, you may want to talk with your loved one.
2. **Listen.** Be available when he or she wants to talk. Refrain from offering too much advice; instead, try to be understanding.
3. **Be patient.** Fear can be limiting; it can be especially difficult to understand if you cannot comprehend the basis of the fear. Try to remember that everyone has different fears and levels of fear.
4. **Suggest that your loved one seek professional help.** Patience and understanding can only go so far. A therapist can help your loved one identify the root of the problem and determine how to best deal with the fear.

COVID-19: Managing Anxiety and Stress

The outbreak of COVID-19 coronavirus may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live in.

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
- Children and teens
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use
- If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others call 911
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline: 1.800.985.5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. (TTY 1.800.846.8517)

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website at [samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov).

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

Things You Can Do to Support Yourself

- Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, wellbalanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

Call your health care provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

Reduce Stress in Yourself and Others

Sharing the facts about COVID-19 and understanding the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful. When you share accurate information about COVID-19 you can help make people feel less stressed and allow you to connect with them.

Learn more about taking care of your emotional health.

For parents

Children and teens react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with the COVID-19 calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.

Not all children and teens respond to stress in the same way. Some common changes to watch for include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting)
- Excessive worry or sadness
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens
- Poor school performance or avoiding school
- Difficulty with attention and concentration
- Avoidance of activities enjoyed in the past
- Unexplained headaches or body pain
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

There are many things you can do to support your child:

- Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
- Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- Limit your family’s exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

For responders

Responding to COVID-19 can take an emotional toll on you. There are things you can do to reduce secondary traumatic stress (STS) reactions:

- Acknowledge that STS can impact anyone helping families after a traumatic event.
- Learn the symptoms including physical (fatigue, illness) and mental (fear, withdrawal, guilt).
- Allow time for you and your family to recover from responding to the pandemic.
- Create a menu of personal self-care activities that you enjoy, such as spending time with friends and family, exercising, or reading a book.
- Take a break from media coverage of COVID-19.
- Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for your family and patients as you did before the outbreak.

For people who have been released from quarantine

Being separated from others if a health care provider thinks you may have been exposed to COVID-19 can be stressful, even if you do not get sick. Everyone feels differently after coming out of quarantine. Some feelings include:

- Mixed emotions, including relief after quarantine
- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- Stress from the experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have unfounded fears of contracting the disease from contact with you, even though you have been determined not to be contagious
- Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties during quarantine
- Other emotional or mental health changes

Children may also feel upset or have other strong emotions if they, or someone they know, has been released from quarantine.

Source

Centers for Disease Prevention and Control: www.cdc.gov

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.

Steps to Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 if You are Sick

Follow the steps below: If you are sick with COVID-19 or think you might have it, follow the steps below to help protect other people in your home and community.

Stay Home Except to get Medical Care

- **Stay home:** People who are mildly ill with COVID-19 are able to recover at home. Do not leave, except to get medical care. Do not visit public areas.
- **Stay in touch with your doctor:** Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you feel worse or you think it is an emergency.
- **Avoid public transportation:** Avoid using public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.

Separate yourself from other people in your home, this is known as home isolation

- **Stay away from others:** As much as possible, you should stay in a specific “sick room” and away from other people in your home. Use a separate bathroom, if available.
 - **Limit contact with pets and animals:** You should restrict contact with pets and other animals, just like you would around other people.
- Although there have not been reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19, it is still recommended that people with the virus limit contact with animals until more information is known.
- When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick with COVID-19. If you must care for your pet or be around animals while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with them.

If Someone in Your Home is Sick

Call ahead before visiting your doctor

- **Call ahead:** If you have a medical appointment, call your doctor’s office or emergency department, and tell them you have or may have COVID-19. This will help the office protect themselves and other patients.

Wear a facemask if you are sick

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people and before you enter a healthcare provider’s office.
- **If you are caring for others:** If the person who is sick is not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live in the home should stay in a different room.

When caregivers enter the room of the sick person, they should wear a facemask. Visitors, other than caregivers, are not recommended.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

- **Cover:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- **Dispose:** Throw used tissues in a lined trash can.
- **Wash hands:** Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Clean your hands often

- **Wash hands:** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. This is especially important after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food.

Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.

- **Hand sanitizer:** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- **Soap and water:** Soap and water are the best option, especially if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Avoid touching:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Handwashing Tips

Avoid sharing personal household items

- **Do not share:** Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with other people in your home.
- **Wash thoroughly after use:** After using these items, wash them thoroughly with soap and water or put in the dishwasher.

Clean all “high-touch” surfaces everyday

Clean high-touch surfaces in your isolation area (“sick room” and bathroom) every day; let a caregiver clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces in other areas of the home.

- Clean and disinfect: Routinely clean high-touch surfaces in your “sick room” and bathroom. Let someone else clean and disinfect surfaces in common areas, but not your bedroom and bathroom.
- If a caregiver or other person needs to clean and disinfect a sick person’s bedroom or bathroom, they should do so on an as-needed basis. The caregiver/other person should wear a mask and wait as long as possible after the sick person has used the bathroom.

High-touch surfaces include phones, remote controls, counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables.

- Clean and disinfect areas that may have blood, stool, or body fluids on them.
- Household cleaners and disinfectants: Clean the area or item with soap and water or another detergent if it is dirty. Then, use a household disinfectant.
- Be sure to follow the instructions on the label to ensure safe and effective use of the product. Many products recommend keeping the surface wet for several minutes to ensure germs are killed. Many also recommend precautions such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.
- Most EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.

Monitor Your Symptoms

- **Seek medical attention, but call first:** Seek medical care right away if your illness is worsening (for example, if you have difficulty breathing).
- **Call your doctor before going in:** Before going to the doctor’s office or emergency room, call ahead and tell them your symptoms. They will tell you what to do.
- **Wear a facemask:** If possible, put on a facemask before you enter the building. If you can’t put on a facemask, try to keep a safe distance from other people (at least 6 feet away). This will help protect the people in the office or waiting room.
- **Follow care instructions from your healthcare provider and local health department:** Your local health authorities will give instructions on checking your symptoms and reporting information.
- **Call 911 if you have a medical emergency:** If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, notify the operator that you have or think you might have, COVID-19. If possible, put on a facemask before medical help arrives.

How to Discontinue Home Isolation

People with COVID-19 who have stayed home (home isolated) can stop home isolation under the following conditions:

- If you will not have a test to determine if you are still contagious, you can leave home after these three things have happened:

- You have had no fever for at least 72 hours (that is three full days of no fever without the use medicine that reduces fevers) **AND**
- Other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved) **AND**
- At least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared
- If you will be tested to determine if you are still contagious, you can leave home after these three things have happened:
- You no longer have a fever (without the use medicine that reduces fevers) **AND**
- Other symptoms have improved (for example, when your cough or shortness of breath have improved) **AND**
- You received two negative tests in a row, 24 hours apart.

In all cases, follow the guidance of your healthcare provider and local health department. The decision to stop home isolation should be made in consultation with your healthcare provider and state and local health departments. Local decisions depend on local circumstances.

Caring for Yourself at Home

10 things to manage your health at home

If you have possible or confirmed COVID-19:

- Stay home from work, school, and away from other public places. If you must go out, avoid using any kind of public transportation, ridesharing, or taxis.
- Monitor your symptoms carefully. If your symptoms get worse, call your healthcare provider immediately.
- Get rest and stay hydrated.
- If you have a medical appointment, call the healthcare provider ahead of time and tell them that you have or may have COVID-19.
- For medical emergencies, call 911 and notify the dispatch personnel that you have or may have COVID-19.
- Cover your cough and sneezes.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or clean your hands with an alcoholbased hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- As much as possible, stay in a specific room and away from other people in your home. Also, you should use a separate bathroom, if available. If you need to be around other people in or outside of the home, wear a facemask.
- Avoid sharing personal items with other people in your household, like dishes, towels, and bedding
- Clean all surfaces that are touched often, like counters, tabletops, and doorknobs. Use household cleaning sprays or wipes according to the label instructions.

For any additional questions about your care, contact your healthcare provider or state or local health department.

Source

Centers for Disease Prevention and Control: www.cdc.gov

Isolation Guide

Isolation Survival Guide: Caring for Yourself and Your Family

Isolation is difficult. As naturally social creatures, we crave contact with others and the freedom to travel. But with government warnings to remain home and avoid contact with people outside our families, it's natural that we might feel anxious, isolated and frustrated. The following tips can help you and your family members maintain your health and well-being during these challenging times.

Keeping in Touch

- Arrange when possible to video chat with friends and family members you'd normally see in person. The added ability to see faces is important to your social well-being.
- If video chat isn't an option, set times to talk on the phone or just text when you feel the need to reach out.
- Keep in mind that you can continue to meet with your book or movie club, or other social group. You just can't do it in person. Create a group chat, arrange a video chat or simply email each other your thoughts on the book or movie.
- This is also a good time to check whether your email addresses and phone numbers are up to date. Page through and call or email family and friends. If the number or address is right, chat for a while. If it isn't, call around and ask if anyone else has the information.
- Put together digital scrapbooks with photos of friends and share them. Reminisce about the good times you've had and make plans for get-togethers once it's safe to do so.

Make Connections With Others in Similar Situations

- Check out your local community website, facebook group or similar online gathering spots. There are likely plenty of people in the same situation. Share tips, or just relate stories about how you're spending your time. They may have good ideas of their own.
- Stay active on social media, but keep in mind, you can get too much of a good thing. Also, avoid political discussions and information about the coronavirus. You're likely getting enough of that from the news media. Use your online time to distract yourself and be social.

Commit to a Routine

- Plan out your time. Write it down and post it in a prominent place. This is especially important if you have small children, who crave routine.
- Try to follow your routine as much as possible. Get up at the same time everyday, follow your usual morning routines, and go to bed at your usual time. Set alarms to remind you of your new schedule.
- As part of your schedule, plan activities to do on different days.
- This can be a great time to improve your routine, too. If your bedtime has been creeping later and later, set an earlier bedtime and plan to get up earlier and exercise, meditate or to simply take some time for yourself.
- Remember, during our normally busy lives, most of us would love some more free time. Now is your chance to take advantage of it.

For families:

- Agree on a household routine. Try to give everyone you live with a say in this agreement.
- Schedule regular dinners together so you can catch up. Even if you've spent all day together, it's unlikely, between work and chores, that you've had a lot of time to talk.
- Try to respect each other's privacy and give each other space. For example, some people might want to discuss everything they're doing while others won't.

Keep Active

Build physical activity into your daily routine. Even if you don't have home exercise equipment, there's still plenty you can do, no matter what your fitness level. Try:

- Vigorous cleaning such as mopping and wiping down windows burns calories
- Have a spontaneous dance party
- Walk or jog up and down stairs a few times
- Check out online exercise workouts that you can follow
- Stretch, try a few yoga poses or do simple calisthenics like jumping jacks
- Wrestle with your kids or play indoor tag or hide-and-go- seek

Seek Out Sunlight, Fresh Air and Nature

Sunlight, fresh air and nature are vital to mental health and well-being. Each can improve mood, reduce stress and anger, and ease tension. While it might not be possible to get outside at the moment, you can try to bring some nature inside:

- Open windows to let in fresh air
- Flowers and potted plants can elevate mood and have even been shown in studies to improve indoor air quality.
- Bring in some natural elements such as fern fronds or cut some early growth flowers and arrange them in a vase
- Find a comfortable space by a window where you can get a view of trees or the sky. Watch birds and other animals, if they're around.
- Pull up photos of your favorite places in nature. Take a virtual tour of the national parks. NPS.gov offers photos and videos of the best sites in each of the parks. Or take a virtual tour on Google maps. You'll be surprised at how immersive an experience it can be.
- Listen to natural sounds, like recordings or apps that play birdsong, ocean waves or rainfall.
- Get as much natural sunlight as you can. Spend time in your yard, if you have one, or sit in an open window or on your doorstep.

Parenting Tips

- Think about being more lenient with your children's social media and mobile phone use during their time away from school. Children and young people who go to school will be used to being around other children for several hours a day. They might find it difficult to be removed from this, especially if they're also worried about their health.
- In addition to their online school work, encourage your children to choose some books or podcasts they'd like to explore. You can also think about card games, board games and puzzles, and other ways to stay mentally active or be creative.
- For older kids, there are free online courses they could try out. For example, [Kahn Academy](#), [Future Learn](#) and even [Harvard](#) offer classes covering everything from basic math to computer programming. Your local library might also have online activities or resources you can use.

Find Ways to Use Your Time

- It's time for spring cleaning. Think about tackling that overstuffed closet, crawl space or garage. Box things to donate and others to dispose of. Once isolation is over, you can quickly send them to the appropriate place.
- Do the same for your digital life. Clear old apps, files, emails and programs from your computer. Upgrade whatever software is out of date and check to make sure all your passwords are up to date.
- We all contract with service providers: grocery deliveries, move and TV subscriptions, cleaners, even power providers, in some areas. Take this time to research alternatives and compare costs.
- How are your finances? Now's the perfect time to review your accounts and get a picture of how close you are to your financial goals. Try signing up for a service like [Nerd Wallet](#) so you can keep all your information in one place.

Hobby Time

- Nothing's more important during a long stretch stuck inside than hobbies, for example:
- Arts and crafts, such as drawing, painting, collage and sewing
- Home improvement projects
- Try coloring, there are books for kids and adults
- Take up an instrument you've always wanted to learn, or try just singing to the
- Journaling or writing

Keep Your Mind Stimulated

- Keep your brain occupied and challenged. Set aside time in your routine for this. Read books, magazines and articles. Listen to podcasts, watch films and do puzzles.
- Your local libraries may have apps you can use to borrow ebooks, audiobooks or magazines from home for free
- There are lots of apps that can help you learn things, such as a foreign language or other new skills.

Resources

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: www.samhsa.gov
- Mind.org: www.mind.org.uk

Families at Home

How can I control my temper around my children?

It is common for parents to become frustrated with their children sometimes. Anger is a completely normal human emotion, but it can easily get out of control. Learning to handle your anger, especially around impressionable children, will help not only you as a parent, but your child who will learn from example.

Consider the following tips for effectively handling anger:

- **Be aware:** Be aware of your anger and your emotional level. Then do whatever necessary to calm yourself before yelling or acting out physically with your child.
- **Start counting:** The old method of counting to ten before you respond to your child really works. It gives you a few seconds to take some deep breaths, collect your thoughts and allow your frustration to decrease.
- **Take a break:** Give yourself a “time out.” Go to another room, walk around the backyard for a few minutes or run up and down the stairs a few times. Getting away from the situation and physically exerting yourself allows some of the stress to dissipate. You can then return to address the situation more appropriately.
- **Take a break mentally:** You do not necessarily have to move away from the situation to get away from it all. Create a special place in your mind where you can go whenever these angry moments arise. Repeat a phrase to yourself that helps you feel relaxed.
- **Do not spin on it:** Often when we think back to a negative or frustrating situation, old anger can resurface. Remind yourself that getting angry again is not going to fix anything and it will not help you feel better. Try to recall how badly you felt the last time you allowed your anger to control your words and actions.
- **Tighten up to loosen up:** Take a couple minutes and start to tighten your muscles and then relax them. Start with your feet and toes, and then tighten your leg muscles and release. Tighten your arm muscles and then relax them. This series of actions will help you relax by sending endorphins to your brain to help you calm down.
- **Share your stress:** It is healthy to share your feelings with other parents. Set up a buddy system and call them whenever necessary to help talk you out of your anger. If necessary, this parent (whether your partner, neighbor or friend) may be able to step in for a few minutes to tend to your child while you take a walk and calm down. In return, you can be supportive during times in which they are experiencing frustration and anger as well.
- **Change the situation:** Often, children will act out because they are bored, tired or hungry. Try to assess the situation from their perspective and consider how you may be able to adjust their routine to get them into a better state.

Resources

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): www.nimh.nih.gov

Helping Children Cope with Emergencies

Regardless of your child's age, he or she may feel upset or have other strong emotions after an emergency. Some children react right away, while others may show signs of difficulty much later. How a child reacts and the common signs of distress can vary according to the child's age, previous experiences, and how the child typically copes with stress.

Children react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with a disaster calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

People can become more distressed if they see repeated images of a disaster in the media. Early on, consider limiting the amount of exposure you and your loved ones get to media coverage.

Factors that Influence the Emotional Impact on Children in Emergencies

The amount of damage caused from a disaster can be overwhelming. The destruction of homes and separation from school, family, and friends can create a great amount of stress and anxiety for children.

The emotional impact of an emergency on a child depends on a child's characteristics and experiences, the social and economic circumstances of the family and community, and the availability of local resources. Not all children respond in the same ways. Some might have more severe, longer-lasting reactions. The following specific factors may affect a child's emotional response:

- Direct involvement with the emergency
- Previous traumatic or stressful event
- Belief that the child or a loved one may die
- Loss of a family member, close friend, or pet
- Separation from caregivers
- Physical injury
- How parents and caregivers respond
- Family resources
- Relationships and communication among family members
- Repeated exposure to mass media coverage of the emergency and aftermath
- Ongoing stress due to the change in familiar routines and living conditions
- Cultural differences
- Community resilience

What You Can Do to Help Children Cope with a Disaster

Setting a good example for your children by managing your stress through healthy lifestyle choices, such as eating healthy, exercising regularly, getting plenty of sleep, and avoiding drugs and alcohol, is critical for parents and caregivers. When you are prepared, rested, and relaxed you can respond better to unexpected events and can make decisions in the best interest of your family and loved ones.

The following tips can help reduce stress before, during, and after a disaster or traumatic event.

Before

- Talk to your children so that they know you are prepared to keep them safe.
- Review safety plans before a disaster or emergency happens. Having a plan will increase your children's confidence and help give them a sense of control.

During

- Stay calm and reassure your children.
- Talk to children about what is happening in a way that they can understand. Keep it simple and appropriate for each child's age.

After

- Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they went through or what they think about it. Encourage them to share concerns and ask questions.
- You can help your children feel a sense of control and manage their feelings by encouraging them to take action directly related to the disaster. For example, children can help others after a disaster, including volunteering to help community or family members in a safe environment.
- It is difficult to predict how some children will respond to disasters and traumatic events. Because parents, teachers, and other adults see children in different situations, it is important for them to work together to share information about how each child is coping after a traumatic event.

Common Reactions

The common reactions to distress will fade over time for most children. Children who were directly exposed to a disaster can become upset again; behavior related to the event may return if they see or hear reminders of what happened. If children continue to be very upset or if their reactions hurt their schoolwork or relationships then parents may want to talk to a professional or have their children talk to someone who specializes in children's emotional needs. Learn more about common reactions to distress:

For infants to 2 year olds

Infants may become more cranky. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

For 3 to 6 year olds

Preschool and kindergarten children may return to behaviors they have outgrown. For example, toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents/ caregivers. They may also have tantrums or a hard time sleeping.

For 7 to 10 year olds

Older children may feel sad, mad, or afraid that the event will happen again. Peers may share false information; however, parents or caregivers can correct the misinformation. Older children may focus on details of the event and want to talk about it all the time or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.

For preteens and teenagers

Some preteens and teenagers respond to trauma by acting out. This could include reckless driving, and alcohol or drug use. Others may become afraid to leave the home. They may cut back on how much time they spend with their friends. They can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their emotions may lead to increased arguing and even fighting with siblings, parents/ caregivers or other adults.

For special needs children

Children who need continuous use of a breathing machine or are confined to a wheelchair or bed, may have stronger reactions to a threatened or actual disaster. They might have more intense distress, worry or anger than children without special needs because they have less control over day-to-day well-being than other people. The same is true for children with other physical, emotional, or intellectual limitations. Children with special needs may need extra words of reassurance, more explanations about the event, and more comfort and other positive physical contact such as hugs from loved ones.

Source

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov

Building Parenting Resilience

Every parent goes through times when the pressures of being a parent feel overwhelming. You can be a positive role model to your kids by practicing self-control techniques and relaxation methods. Get in touch with the source of your stress and your body's physical symptoms. Ask for help when you need it, and take advantage of support resources available to you. Keep parenting stress from getting the best of you by taking a timeout and focusing on what is important.

Why Parents Feel Stressed

Here are some common stress triggers for parents:

- **Unfair expectations:** Many parents have an unrealistic vision for their family—an expectation that each member should be as close to perfect as possible. When children or spouses fail to live up to these standards, it is easy to become frustrated and stressed.
- **Unresolved conflicts:** Difficulties from your childhood or unresolved anger toward your own parents can make it hard to know how to act as a parent. Even if you feel your parents did the wrong things, it can be confusing to know what the right ones are.
- **Lack of time for yourself:** Parents miss the free time they once enjoyed. It is better to face the fact that your children will demand and deserve your time than to resent it. Remind yourself that as your children grow up, their independence will allow you to reclaim some of your time.
- **Lack of appreciation:** Parents can resent it if they feel that their child does not respect or appreciate them. It is important to keep in mind that showing appreciation is probably a more natural concept for adults than it is for kids.
- **Navigating the demands of work and home:** Dual-earner couples with children have become much more common than a generation ago. Many parents have no experience or role models to turn to when they need help navigating competing demands on their time, energy and emotions.

Signs of Stress

It is important to recognize the physical symptoms of stress. Of course, it is always a good idea to rule out any possible physical illness that could be contributing to these symptoms by visiting your doctor. Common physical complaints linked to stress include:

- Fatigue or exhaustion
- Muscle spasms or nervous twitches
- Headaches
- Grinding teeth or a clenched jaw
- Clenched fists
- Nervous habits, such as picking at skin or biting nails
- Fidgety or jittery hands
- Skin rashes
- Recurrent colds or flus
- Forgetfulness
- Upset stomach.

Ways to Cope with Stress

Try these suggestions:

- **Seek help:** Do not wait until your breaking point if you cannot control your anger.
- **Recognize and admit when you are feeling anxious and stressed:** Listen to what your body is telling you through physical signs of stress, such as headaches and stomach discomfort.
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - What is the worst thing that can happen?
 - Is there anything more I can do to improve the situation?
 - How will this outcome affect my life in the long run?
 - What can I learn from this?
 - What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?

- **Avoid setting unrealistic expectations and too many lofty goals:** Remember that all children misbehave, and all parents make mistakes. Sometimes being good is good enough.
- **Focus on the positives:** Recognize that for everything that may go wrong, there may be multiple things that go right. Be proud of your accomplishments, and celebrate your successes. Create a “joy” journal in which you list at least five things a day you are grateful for.
- **Make time for yourself:** Take a little time each day for something you like to do: a hobby, a walk with your partner, a home improvement project, etc. Spend a half-hour just sitting quietly listening to soothing music or meditating peacefully. Take advantage of your free time engaging in fulfilling activities. Arrange for a babysitter, or take advantage of relatives who can relieve you for a few hours.
- **Learn to say “no” and to delegate responsibilities at home and at work:** Remember, when you ask for help with a chore or project, you give up the expectation that it will be completed exactly as you would have.
- **Alternate parenting duties:** Adopt a “tag team” approach with your spouse, and take turns with disciplining, playing with your kids, driving to and from events, etc.
- **Get your home organized:** Tackle one task at a time, if possible. List out your duties in order of priority, and complete one at a time. This can make you feel more organized and in control, leading to a sense of greater accomplishment. Create schedules and calendars to stay on track.
- **Break from home routines:** While schedules and consistency are very important for families, it is OK to do something spontaneously different with your kids from time to time. Make it a fun break from the norm—such as letting your kids stay up an hour later one weekend night to play a family board game together.
- **Identify your trigger points and know your limits:** Get to know the situations and circumstances that cause you the most stress, and learn ways to avoid them.
- **Laugh and learn:** Instead of getting irritated, learn to laugh at life’s annoyances and learn from your mistakes. Accept stress as an everyday part of life. Often, the best way to cope is to “go with the flow”—to accept those things that we cannot currently change.
- **Get enough rest:** Doctors recommend at least eight hours of sleep a night for adults. There is a term for those who say they can get by on four or five—sleep deprived.
- **Exercise regularly:** Running, brisk walking, aerobic exercises and other repetitive fitness activities are especially beneficial. Experts recommend exercising at least 20 to 30 minutes three to five times a week.
- **Avoid drugs:** Do not rely on over-the-counter drugs, such as aspirin, to manage your stress. Talk to your doctor about taking any medications properly. Stay away from alcohol, tranquilizers and other drugs. These may contribute to depression and an increased sense of loss of control.

Tips for Relaxation

Try these techniques to help you relax and reduce the stress of parenting:

- **Breathing exercises:** Draw slow, deep breaths from the diaphragm, which is located just below the center of your ribcage. Exhale slowly and evenly. If you are highly stressed, try this lying on your back.
- **Yoga and stretching exercises:** These can relieve tension, make your body more limber and flexible, and produce an overall calming effect.
- **Visualization:** Try sitting in a comfortable, quiet environment, closing your eyes, and freeing your mind from its many concerns for even a few minutes each day.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation techniques:** Try tensing, relaxing and visualizing each major muscle group. Make a fist, and hold it tight for at least five seconds. Feel the tension in your hand and arm. Finally, relax your hand and visualize the tension escaping your body. Do the same with your other hand, your neck, your face and your limbs.
- Aim to organize your home, and plan your time efficiently. Do not be afraid to ask for help from loved ones, and when you feel you have reached your boiling point, step back and take a time out. It is not worth losing your temper and doing something you will regret. Regain your composure, and practice those techniques that help to calm and soothe your nerves.
- Ask other parents for their advice on handling parenting pressures, and share your suggestions with them.

[Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.](#)

Sibling Rivalry

Most brothers and sisters have a tendency to disagree and fight at some point while growing up together. In fact, experts say that fighting between siblings can often be a healthy sign. It is important to understand that some degree of sibling rivalry is common and normal. It is usually how parents react to their children's behavior that determines whether the rivalry will improve or worsen.

Why Sibling Rivalry Occurs

You have seen it happen with your kids. You have probably experienced it yourself many times with a brother or sister. Bickering. Arguing and shouting. Lashing out with hurtful comments. Siblings do not always see eye to eye and resentments can be easily formed, especially when your kids are young. Experts believe there are two main reasons why sibling rivalry develops:

- The clashing of identities. Each child is continually trying to discover who they are. When a brother or sister enters his or her world, he or she may view that child as a threat to his or her identity. If one child is successful in a certain facet of life (e.g., a gifted athlete), the other sibling may feel pressured to change his or her identity to match or exceed that success. Conflicts over possessions (e.g., toys, clothes, etc.) can also easily arise. The reluctance to share these possessions and experiences may stem from a fear of compromising one's identity.
- Competition for the attention of parents. When a new child enters the family, the older sibling can feel jealous and threatened. He or she may feel like they are not getting the same amount or quality of attention from their parents as before.

Realizing that sibling rivalry is a normal, expected part of growing up is a parent's first step in approaching the problem. The second step is to know when and how to respond appropriately to negative sibling rivalry behavior. By setting clear and firm boundaries, house rules and limits, your children will have a behavioral framework to follow and know what to expect should they violate your rules. The third step is to recognize when a small problem has turned into a large one that requires outside assistance. Do not be afraid to get help if you routinely observe in one or both of your children:

- Physical or mental harm and violent outbursts;
- Low self-esteem;
- Signs of depression;
- Fear or anxiety of the other sibling; and
- Substance abuse.

Parenting Tips

Every relationship between two siblings is different and requires its own unique parenting approach. Experts recommend trying these proven suggestions:

- **Do not interfere unless someone is getting hurt.** Letting your kids handle their differences by themselves is a good interpersonal skill builder. If a weaker or smaller child is getting physically hurt or mentally abused, however, it is time to intervene.
- **Do not try to prove guilt or innocence.** Saying things like "Who started it?" can worsen the situation. The question assumes that one child is at fault and encourages each child to blame the other in both honest and dishonest ways.
- **Suggest solutions.** If no one is being hurt, but you still feel like it is important to intervene, suggest a productive solution to their problem without enforcing it. "Why don't you take turns sharing the computer? Mike can have 30 minutes, and then Tommy can use it for 30 minutes."
- **Do not pick favorites.** Also, avoid comparing your children and assigning labels. It may sound hurtful for your child to hear you say something to an adult like, "Mike is the smart one, and Johnny is the athletic one in the family."

- **Avoid forced harmony.** Pressuring your kids to accept each other, accompany one another and behave nicely together may only breed resentment and worsen the rivalry. Give them space to do their own things and to discover their individual talents.
- **Acknowledge feelings but discourage actions.** It is okay if your child is unhappy with something his or her brother did, but hitting, kicking, pushing or harming the other child in any way should not be tolerated. Set boundaries for behavior, not feelings.
- **Understand the causes.** Put yourself in their shoes: the older sibling is probably jealous of the attention you give to the younger, and vice versa. Pay attention to how your kids interact: do they tend to misbehave together more when you are visibly around?
- **Talk about the rivalry with each child.** Try to make each child understand why a sibling acts the way he or she does. Explain that the other child is going through a different stage of growing up that is hard to understand, and that his or her needs are different from that of other siblings. Aim to reassure each child with statements such as, "Your brother did not really mean it when he said he hates you. He just has a short temper at his age right now, and he needs more time to himself." Allow each child a private means to voice his or her feelings about a sibling to you, and discuss these emotions together. Knowing that you are at least listening and trying to understand his or her frustration can help a child better cope with a sibling rivalry.
- **Be patient.** Sibling relationships constantly change. Chances are good that your kids will grow out of their rivalry as they mature. New rivalries can also emerge later in life, so prepare for the unexpected and let them work it out themselves whenever possible.

It is difficult to hold back when your children are fighting. Try to resist the urge to get involved and have faith in your children's abilities to resolve their own differences. If the rivalry has turned into a serious emotional problem that is continually upsetting your family, or if physical violence or emotional abuse persists between siblings, talk to a professional.

Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org
- American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry: www.aacap.org
- Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.childwelfare.gov

Struggling with Anger

Everyone gets angry, and when we're confined to close quarters with the same people day after day, that anger can often get the best of us. While anger is a difficult emotion, most people handle it as best they can with minimal consequences. Sometimes, just a sincere apology can work wonders.

The Cycle of Anger

Some people constantly struggle with anger. Sometimes this is due to a life experience, such as being raised in a family environment full of anger. Others just seem to have a volatile temperament. Often, it is a combination of these two factors. Understanding the often-addictive cycle of anger and developing the tools to cope with this cycle can help you successfully manage anger.

The cycle of anger often begins with an emotional injury of some sort. Often, there is a rapid progression through a sequence of inaccurate and inflammatory thoughts. This progression through a series of almost automatic and distorted thoughts can quickly lead to an inappropriate expression of anger.

The first step in anger management is to understand the cycle of anger and the thoughts that propel it. Here is an example of how inaccurate thoughts can lead to escalating stages of anger:

1. In its first stage, emotional hurt can spark a rapid emotional reaction, leading to an inaccurate perception. For example, if your spouse says to you, "This place is a mess!" you feel hurt because you interpret this to mean that the messy house is your fault.
2. In the second stage, you arrive at a faulty interpretation of the emotional hurt without time to reflect on the facts or missed emotional clues. Perhaps your spouse is not blaming you for the condition of the house as much as he or she is just stating a fact. Because the statement hurt you, you may jump to the conclusion that he or she thinks the situation is your fault.
3. In the third stage, you may feel overly sensitive. Perhaps the way anger was dealt with in your childhood causes you to be overly sensitive to the simple statement, "This house is a mess!" You interpret it to mean that you are a failure in your spouse's eyes.
4. In the fourth stage, called the "decision-making stage," you may make a snap judgment based on your inaccurate reading of the situation. You may decide, "My spouse does not understand or care about me; he or she only cares about how neat the house is."
5. In the fifth stage, called the "feelings stage," you may begin to seethe with intense feelings of anger and resentment. These angry feelings can become addictive, and you may have trouble letting go of them.
6. In the "behavioral response" stage, your intense anger boils over, and you react with rapid, angry outbursts. These can take the form of yelling, throwing things, engaging in physical violence or saying things with the specific intention of hurting.
7. The seventh stage, or "self-appraisal stage," may lead you to minimize the impact of your anger, and even blame others for your poor behavior. This sets the stage for the next angry act, and the cycle begins again.

Break the Cycle of Anger

If you recognize this cycle of anger, you are on your way to controlling it. The next step is to take some preventive measures to keep your anger in check. Here are some steps you can take to help break your cycle of anger:

1. **Understand your mood changes:** Know that your moods can change unpredictably, independently of what is going on in the external world. Do not waste your time looking for someone to blame. Focus on learning to tolerate your bad mood, knowing that it will pass. Change your mental set by getting involved in a new activity, such as conversing with a friend, reading a book or exercising.
2. **Have a structured "blow-out" time:** Set aside a predictable time for just letting go. Find out what works for you, whether it is playing your favorite music at high volume, going shopping or having a feast. Find an activity that allows you to safely vent your anger.

3. **Develop a helpful habit:** Healthy habits can include exercise, spiritual commitment, music, journal writing or some other positive pursuit. Use your helpful habit to calm yourself when you start to feel the cycle of anger beginning.
4. **Learn how to name your feelings:** Many people, particularly men, get frustrated and angry because they cannot put their feelings into words. With practice, this is a helpful skill to develop.
5. **Use symbols, mantras and sayings:** Use them as shorthand ways of labeling and quickly putting angry comments and rudeness into perspective. This is not the same as making excuses or turning yourself into a doormat. This is just a way to give yourself time to gather more data, to try and understand the person before you react. For example, if a co-worker repeatedly says things you find offensive, you might repeat a mantra in your mind, such as, "This is his or her problem, not mine."
6. **Use timeouts as you would with a child:** When you are upset, give yourself a timeout. Go away someplace safe, and do not return until you have calmed down.
7. **Do not become automatically defensive:** Sometimes it is appropriate to have angry feelings.
8. **Exercise vigorously and regularly:** Schedule regular exercise, and stick with it. Exercise helps work off excess energy, aggression and anger in a positive way. It soothes and calms your body and mind.
9. **Learn to joke with yourself and others about your sensitivity and your quick temper:** If you can bring a sense of humor to your failings, others will forgive you much more quickly.
10. **Seek professional help:** Seek it from a doctor, counselor or clergyman when your anger begins to have a negative effect on you or your family's happiness, or when it affects your success at work.

Anger management is a skill that can be learned. It takes hard work and practice, but it is well worth the effort. If you can take the energy that had been expressed in angry outbursts and redirect it in other, more productive ways, you will be amazed at how much you can accomplish. Then, instead of angry sulking, you will feel energized with satisfaction.

Contributed by Dr. Edward Hallowell.

Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov
- National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov

Dealing With the Effects of Social Disruption

Supporting Family, Friends and Co-workers

Sometimes the best cure for our feelings of isolation and life disruption is to reach out to support someone else.

Supporting family, friends and co-workers mostly means being a good, empathetic listener.

Parents will be a source of support for their kids, managers to their staff, and family and friends to each other. Whether communicating with an adult or a child, acknowledge the awful reality and permit expression of feelings. When appropriate, try to put the catastrophe into perspective with reminders of how rare and unusual the traumatic events are and how the best law-enforcement, medical and diplomatic leaders in the world are vigorously attacking the crisis.

Be honest with yourself and those around you. You and your friends and family may be experiencing distress that interferes with your well-being and ability to cope with the normal demands of life. Review the list of common reactions below.

Symptoms of Distress

1. Emotional withdrawal from friends and family
2. Confusion, disorientation or an unusually short attention span
3. Diminished ability to solve problems
4. Interruption of normal eating or sleeping habits, or nightmares
5. An abrupt change in regular daily activities
6. Increased alcohol consumption
7. Changes in speech patterns
8. Antisocial acts

People in distress also sometimes experience heightened emotions of fear, guilt, anxiety, denial, depression and anger, as well as physical fatigue, chest pains, elevated blood pressure, rapid heart rate, sweating and tremors.

How to Cope

First, understand that such reactions to distress are normal and will likely subside over time. People usually go through the predictable stages of coping with distress or grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance.

There are ways you can reduce the impact of these events on your health and well-being. To help the healing process along, consider the following:

- **Take care of yourself.** You cannot help others if your own perspective is out of balance. A crisis leaves us all with less confidence and control, and it is all the more important to control what we can.
- **Get in touch with how you give meaning to life.** Draw on your spiritual faith and personal values to remind you of the larger perspective. Take a few minutes every day to reflect on the positive aspects of your life.
- **Understand that everything will not immediately go back to normal** as it was before, but look for the evidence that you are able to continue forward with life, work and love despite the distress.
- **Try to eat regular, healthy meals.** Your body needs essential nutrients during stressful times, so not feeding it enough or overindulging in sweets or fats can throw your body off balance. If your body is off balance, your emotions may be too.
- **It is very important in stressful times to maintain healthy sleep patterns.** Try not to sleep too much or too little. Your energy level and emotional state could be adversely affected by changes in your sleep behavior.
- **If you exercise, try to get back into your normal routine.** Because exercise patterns are linked directly to sleep patterns and caloric intake needs, getting your body back on track will improve your ability to cope with stress. In addition, chemicals released in the brain during exercise have been shown to relieve stress.
- **Donate to charity or support your community in another safe manner.** Whether you make this a one-time effort to do your part or decide to make it a regular activity, doing something good for your community is a great way to deal with stress and improve the quality of life for yourself and others.

The landscape of safety can become permanently altered by a tragedy. It shakes up all of us to some degree. Now is the time to assure safety, to support others and to take care of yourself. The coming days and weeks will provide numerous opportunities to memorialize and learn from a crisis.

Temper Tantrums and Your Young Child

Knowing how to deal with your child when he or she becomes stubborn, does not listen to you and throws a temper tantrum is important. Use the following information to learn how to effectively handle your child's temper tantrums.

Coping Strategies

Here are a few strategies for coping with a young child who chooses to be difficult.

- **Choose your battles.** Do not quibble excessively over trivial matters, like insisting that your resistant child wear the baseball hat you bought her to the baseball game.
- **Be consistent.** Set a routine for going to bed, for instance, and stick to it to avoid sending a mixed signal.
- **Communicate your reasons why and stress positive consequences.** Tell your child why you are asking him or her to pick up his or her toys. Smile and consider saying something like, "We like to pick up our toys because we want the house to look nice for when all of our friends come over."
- **Try tackling fears calmly.** Do not force your child to confront something he or she is afraid of, and do not ridicule or scold if he or she does not. Instead, be reassuring that his or her fear is not so scary. For example, you might pet the neighbor's dog that he or she fears and show that the animal is friendly. Promote independence by not carrying your child when he or she is shy or unsure about other people.
- **Do not lose your composure.** Demonstrate to your child that you are in control. Remember that your child is not trying to be bad; chances are he or she is seeking attention.
- **Remain calm.** Children learn early that their outbursts can control parents, so it is important to try to remain calm, cool and collected.
- **Model appropriately.** Set a good example and do not contradict yourself. For example, if you have set a house rule of not eating sweets before dinner, stick to it yourself.
- **Make reasonable requests.** Ask yourself: Is your child developmentally ready to do what you have asked, or are your expectations too high?

Discipline Positively

Every child disobeys and throws a fit sooner or later. Instead of punishing or physically reprimanding your child, practice these methods:

- **Express your expectations clearly and firmly.** Continue to politely ask your child to do what you have asked. Try to keep your requests short and succinct so that your child will not tune you out.
- **Follow through with positive incentives and natural consequences.** Without bribing your child, give an incentive to do what you have asked. For example, promise to read a book if your child gets in bed on time. If he or she does not listen, pick the child up gently, put him or her in bed, and convey that if instructions were followed, you would have had time to read a story. It will be hard, but do not give in to cries of protest.
- **Try distractions or games.** To curb whining, get your child to focus on something else. "Look, there is a squirrel outside the window!" If he or she fights taking a bath, ask your child to pretend to be a duck. It sounds a little silly, but it often it works.
- **Withdraw your attention.** If you sense weeping or continued whining, do not reward the behavior with attention. Continue to supervise your child's behavior from a distance for a short while.
- **Practice using body language instead of your voice.** If asking your child to do something does not work, some experts recommend saying nothing to correct a child's behavior. Instead, practice restraint while demonstrating firmness and seriousness with your body. Focus a steady, but expressionless gaze on your child, keep your lips closed, and do not smile. Crouch or bend down to the child's level and continue to yield a stone face that indicates your displeasure with her behavior. However, note that this technique may not work well for young children.
- **Try the two chances rule.** Follow through with consequences after the second time you have asked your child to do something, and be consistent with this pattern. If your child thinks you might back down or change your mind, they will not listen the first time.

- **Count to three.** For example, if your child will not stop jumping on the bed, tell him or her that you will count to three, and if the jumping does not stop, you will remove him or her from the room. If you follow through after counting to three, your child will quickly learn that you mean what you say.
- **Enforce time-outs.** This can be especially effective when your child is hurting another child. Take him or her to a room where the child must sit quietly. Timeouts should be age-based due to attention span and ability to understand the passage of time. For example, two-year-old children should get a two-minute time-out. Three-year-olds can handle three minutes of sitting quietly, etc.
- **Try whispering.** If toddler throws a screaming tantrum, especially in a public place, speak softly to him or her in language that is understandable. "I know you wanted that toy, but it is not ours. It is not easy when you cannot have what you want." Calmly remove your child from the situation and do not bring him or her back until he or she is quiet.
- **Avoid bargaining and bribing.** Do not let your child compromise your request or whittle down your demand. Never bribe a child to do what you have asked. And do not give rewards like candy or toys for simply doing what you asked in the first place. Instead, reward with a praising remark or a "Thank you, you did a good job and I appreciate what you have done."
- **Be consistent.** Find an approach that works and stick to it.

Children are constantly learning about their world. Tantrums are often an expression of their need for affection. While it is important to enforce rules, it is also important to reassure your child that you understand her frustration and that, no matter what, you always love her. Try holding and hugging your child, even after an outburst, to reinforce the important bond you have.

Resources

- Family Guide: <http://family.samhsa.gov>
- National Institute of Mental Health: www.nimh.nih.gov



When Children and Parents Are Stuck at Home

Uncertain times and close quarters can make it difficult to cope with the day-to-day stressors. Parents are overwhelmed by financial stressors, supporting their families and adapting to changing work situations. Such efforts can be made even more difficult when children are required to stay at home. The following tips provide helpful ideas for children to develop independence and creativity at home until they can return to their normal routines.

Establish a Morning Routine

Schools provide a structure for children. This helps them orient their day and focus on being productive. Lack of a routine allows disruptive behavior to be the norm in an already chaotic time. Set standard wake-up times and create a schedule of activities for each day. Post the schedule where everyone can see it.

Learn a New Game

Teach your kids a new card game. Popular options for children are War, Crazy 8s, Go Fish and Slapjack. You can also have your children pick out a new game and learn how to play together.

Have a Dance Party

Turn on the music and have fun dancing with your children. To make a game out of it, play something like freeze tag: while the music plays, your children dance and when it stops, they have to hold their pose. The first one to move is out!

Bake

Bake cookies or a cake with your children. Let them pick out the recipe. Teach them how to be careful around the stove and how to measure ingredients correctly. Best of all, you get to eat your delicious creation together after you are done!

Do a Puzzle

Puzzles develop problem-solving skills. Select puzzles based on age range and encourage your child to match colors in order to fit the puzzle together.

Help With Chores

Now is the perfect time to get kids of all ages involved in chores. Sweeping, cleaning kitchen surfaces, collecting laundry, even helping make meals will keep them occupied while teaching vital life skills.



Online Resources for Children at Home

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of children. It also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children.

If you are looking for ways to help your children get the most out of play time, story time or any other time, your GuidanceResources program can help. Click the links below for articles and other parenting resources on guidanceresources.com:

[How can I choose toys that will boost my child's learning?](#)

[10 Brain Strengthening Games](#)

[Play Therapy](#)

[Teaching Children Letters and the Alphabet](#)

[Infant Growth and Development](#)

[What is Exergaming?](#)

[Fun and Learning with Children in the Kitchen](#)

[Learning to Read](#)

[Speech and Language Development in Young Children](#)

[Safe and Educational Play for Young Children](#)

The American Academy of Pediatrics says play helps children develop:

- Imagination
- Physical dexterity
- Cognitive abilities
- Emotional Strength
- Social and other vital skills

The following resources offer online classes, e-learning, multimedia and other materials to keep kids of all ages busy and engaged while in self-isolation.

Preschool and Elementary School

- [ABCMouse](#) – Online curriculum for ages 2 -8. Offers a free 30-day trial.
- [Oxford Owl](#) - Free e-books and math games and activities for ages 3-11
- [BrainPop Junior](#) - Learning tools for STEM, social studies, reading/writing, health and arts for grades K-3
- [The Space Foundation Discovery Center](#) - STEM lesson plans for ages PreK-20
- [Mystery Science](#) - Science lessons for grades K-5
- [Children's Museum Houston](#) - Weather and Science videos and activities for grades PreK-5

Elementary, Middle School

- [ABCYa](#) - Reading and math games and activities for grades PreK-6
- [Zearn.org](#) - Math lessons for grades K-5
- [Scratch](#) - Interactive story, game and animation design from the MIT Media Lab, designed for ages 8 to 16 but available for anyone
- [STMath](#) - Math lessons for grades PreK-8
- [Prodigy Math](#) - Math programs for grades 1-8
- [Curriculum Associates](#) - Math and reading activity packs for grades K-8
- [DK Find Out!](#) - Lessons in subjects such as history, science and coding
- [Listenwise](#) - Non-fiction audio stories covering ELA, social studies and science for grades 2-12
- [CommonLit](#) - Reading and writing lessons for grades 3-12
- [National Geographic Kids Science Lab](#) - Science experiments, videos and articles
- [Scholastic Learn-At-Home Resources](#) - Learning experiences for K-9
- [XtraMath](#) - Math programs for students, parents and teachers

Older Kids and Adults

- [The Smithsonian](#)- The world's largest museum offers learning resources as well as online exhibitions
- [PBS Learning Media](#)- A trusted source of educational content for students, parents and teachers
- [National Ocean Service \(NOAA\) Kids](#) - Science activities and resources for kids and educators
- [Greg Tang Math](#) - Math games and resources for all ages
- [SciShow Kids](#) - Videos explaining scientific concepts for young, curious minds
- [Frontiers for Young Minds](#) - Science articles written by scientists and reviewed by kids
- [The Kid Should See This](#) - STEAM, history, and culture-focused videos for kids of all ages
- [Imagineering in a Box](#) - Lessons on theme park design and engineering via Walt Disney Imagineering, Pixar and Khan Academy
- [BBC Bitesize](#) - Lessons covering math, English, science and more for ages 3-16+
- [BrainPop](#) - Learning tools covering a variety of subjects
- [BreakoutEDU](#) - Immersive learning games for grades K-12
- [Wonderopolis](#) - Educational articles for grades K-12

- [XtraMath](#) - Math programs for students, parents and teachers
- [How Stuff Works](#) - Educational videos exploring the world around us
- [Code.org](#) - Computer science lessons for grades K-12
- [Codecademy](#) - Data science and coding lessons for high school and college students
- [Typing.com](#) - Keyboarding, digital literacy, and coding lessons for all ages
- [IXL](#) - Lessons in math, language arts, science, social studies and Spanish for grades PreK-12
- [Greatminds.org](#) - Math, ELA and science for grades K-12
- [KCET At-Home Learning](#) - Educational resources from PBS SoCal | KCET, in partnership with LAUSD and in collaboration with California PBS stations for grades PreK-12
- [California Academy of Sciences](#) - Apps, immersive interactive tools, and engaging videos covering a variety of science topics
- [Bill Nye the Science Guy](#) - Educational videos covering life, physical and planetary sciences
- [NASA STEM @ Home for Students](#) - STEM articles and activities for grades K-12+
- [Gizmos](#) - Simulations exploring concepts in math and science for grades 3-12
- [Khan Academy](#) - Lessons on grammar, science, history and math for grades K-12
- [Professor Egghead Science Academy](#) - Interactive lessons on science and engineering
- [Quill.org](#) - Writing and grammar activities for grades K-12
- [Quizlet](#) - Flash cards, quizzes and games for languages, arts and humanities, social science, computer skills, science and math
- [Duolingo](#) - Language education for 35 languages
- [Share My Lessons](#) - The American Federation of Teachers' site has lesson plans covering coronavirus and other topics.
- [Annenberg Learner](#) - Multimedia resources for K-12
- [Outschool](#) - Social learning experiences taught over live video chat by accredited teachers
- [Free Code Camp](#) - A collection of 450 free Ivy League courses you can take online

Special Education

The Council for Exceptional Children has developed [COVID-19 information for special educators](#).

The New York City Department of Education offers suggested activities and strategies for families to support [diverse learning at home for special populations](#).

The [Autism Speaks](#) website has tips for recreational and educational activities for children with autism.

Sources

Institute for Corporate Productivity

<https://www.i4cp.com/coronavirusresources-for-parents-educating-school-age-children-at-home>

Oregon Public Broadcasting

<https://www.opb.org/news/article/education-resources-parents-coronavirus-school-closed-oregon/>

COVID-19 and Domestic Violence Awareness

Domestic violence is abuse that occurs between two people in a close relationship. Usually the victim is a spouse or partner, but parents, children or other family members can be victims, too. The violence can take many forms, including:

- Physical abuse
- Psychological, verbal or emotional abuse
- Sexual assault
- Isolation

During the COVID-19 crisis, many families are isolated in close quarters with fewer options for connecting with friends and relatives. In such situations, the anger that fuels domestic abuse can become a serious issue. Remember, if you or another member of your family is in physical danger, call 9-1-1. Emergency services will respond. If you are unsure whether you are in or are witness to an abusive situation, the following information can help.

Understanding Domestic Violence

It is hard to know how common domestic violence is because people often do not report it. There is no typical victim. Domestic violence happens among people of all ages and it affects those of all levels of income and education.

People should know the signs to look for and steps to take if they know somebody who is the victim of domestic violence or they are the victim of abuse themselves. It is time to get help if someone you love or live with does any of the following to you (or you witness another person being mistreated in the following ways):

- Monitors what you are doing all the time
- Controls how you spend your money
- Constantly criticizes you or accuses you of being unfaithful
- Humiliates you in front of others
- Prevents or discourages you from seeing friends and family or going to work or school
- Destroys your property or things that you care about
- Is violent (by hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, punching, slapping, kicking or biting)
- Threatens to hurt you, your children or pets, or threatens to use a weapon against you
- Forces you to have sex against your will
- Blames you for his or her violent outbursts

Violence can shatter a person's life in many ways. Being a victim of violence is widely recognized as a cause for mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Being abused also plays a strong role in developing or worsening substance abuse problems.

If you are a victim of abuse or know a family member or friend who is being abused, your Employee Assistance Program can help with more information about what to do. You also can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at (800) 799-SAFE (7233) or the TTY number at (800) 787-3224. In the event of an emergency, call the police, 911 or your local emergency number.

Domestic Violence and Assault Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline – 800.799.SAFE (7233)

Trained expert advocates are available 24/7 to provide confidential support to anyone experiencing domestic violence or seeking resources and information. Help is available in Spanish and other languages.

National Sexual Assault Hotline – 800.656.HOPE (4673)

Connect with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area that offers access to a range of free services.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children – missingkids.com

24-hour Hotline 800.843.5678

Clearinghouse and comprehensive reporting center for all issues related to the prevention of and recovery from child victimization, such as abduction, abuse and exploitation.

Staying Active

Breathing Exercises

Breathing techniques can help reduce the symptoms of stress. Breathing is something we automatically engage in, and these techniques can help to bring this automatic process into our awareness, allowing us to control the rate and volume of our breathing. There are several breathing techniques you can develop into useful coping strategies. Practicing these techniques will also give you the benefit of increasing levels of oxygen in your bloodstream, which can provide you with physiological benefits along with psychological benefits. Start by practicing at times when you are not feeling stressed so that you become familiar with them.

For all breathing techniques, it is helpful to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth to help you have even, controlled breaths. If you are not able to breathe through your nose, or if it is difficult due to congestion or other issues, it is OK to breathe in through the mouth.

Breathing Techniques

These techniques can be done while sitting, standing or lying down. It can be helpful to place a hand on the abdomen to feel the breath filling the abdomen with each inhalation. The goal of this type of breathing is to breathe slowly and deeply, filling the abdomen before the inhalation rises to the chest. The chest will move very little when engaging in abdominal breathing. The sensation you experience with abdominal breathing is your stomach filling up with air, like an inflating balloon. Upon exhalation, the abdomen will lower, like a deflating balloon.

While practicing this technique, it is helpful to set aside five to ten minutes to engage mindfully in the technique. As your schedule permits, you may want to try this once or twice a day (for example, right after you wake up or just before bedtime). You can increase the time as you become more comfortable with this technique.

Awareness Breathing for Tension Relief

This technique builds on the diaphragmatic breathing technique. While breathing diaphragmatically, say to yourself “breathe in” upon each inhalation. Upon each exhalation, say to yourself “breathe out.” You may want to shorten this to simply “in” and “out.” As you inhale, you may notice tension building within the body. Bring these feelings into your awareness, and as you exhale, feel the tension leaving your body. When stressful thoughts or feelings enter your mind, take note of them and return to the “breathe in” and “breathe out” pattern.

The goal of this technique is relaxation, not perfection, so if you do have other thoughts, be kind to yourself and let them

flow in and out with each breath. Notice the times when it is easier to focus on your breathing and the times when it is more difficult. Again, with this technique, you may want to begin by setting aside five to ten-minute segments throughout the day, increasing the amount of time as you become more comfortable with the technique.

Sighing and Yawning

These are techniques that we already know how to do. Sighing and yawning are natural ways of releasing tension, and practicing these can further relieve your tension. When practicing sighing, take in a deep breath and then “sigh” it out. Repeat this two more times. When practicing yawning, open your mouth wide, stretch out your arms and yawn. Repeat as necessary.

Health Benefits of Deep Breathing

- Delivers greater amounts of oxygen more efficiently into the lower lobes of the lungs, rather than only the upper lobes.
- Drives more waste (CO₂) out of the body.
- Exercises the diaphragm at the base of the lungs, making us more efficient deep breathers over time.
- Improves flexibility and elasticity of the spine, head, neck and back.
- Lowers the levels of circulating cortisol, a stress hormone, in the body.
- Activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps to curb excess stress in the body.
- Increases the production of nitric oxide, an important cellular signaling molecule that functions to expand blood vessels, increase blood flow and protect organs from damage.
- Delivers more oxygen to the cells of the body, including those in the muscles and brain.
- Lowers heart rate and breathing rate.
- Increases alpha brain wave activity, which are brain waves produced during relaxation or meditative states.
- Increases brain wave coherence, which is associated with organized brain function.
- May lead to shorter recovery times and better endurance when utilized consistently.

Resources

Anxiety and Depression Association of America:
www.adaa.org/tips-manage-anxiety-and-stress

Exercises You Can Do While Sitting at Your Desk

Sitting at a desk to work all day is not good for the body. However, if you have to sit for a long period of time, there are some simple exercises you can do to improve your overall body health.

Hands and Arms

- **Hand stretches:** Make fists and tense the muscles in your hands, then relax. Next, spread and stretch your fingers as wide as possible, and then relax.
- **Finger stretches:** Put your index finger on the edge of your desk. Keeping your wrist straight, gently push your finger into the desk and hold as you take a couple of deep breaths. Repeat with all fingers. Do not stretch the thumbs using this method.
- **Thumb stretches:** Put your left palm on the top of your desk. Keep your wrist straight and relax all of your fingers. With your right hand, stretch your thumb away from your forefinger as far as is comfortable. Hold and take a few deep breaths. Release and then repeat with the other thumb.
- **Hand grips:** Get a stress ball or a hand grip; squeeze it to strengthen forearm muscles and relieve hand stress.
- **Wrist rolls:** Regularly rolling your wrists helps prevent carpal tunnel syndrome and improve blood circulation.
- **Reach and stretch:** Reach forward to the sides and above your head to stretch your arms. Simple stretches help prevent stiffness. They also help relax the muscles and, in turn, prevent pinched nerves and other complications from tense muscles.
- **Shoulder rolls:** Roll your shoulders forward and then roll them backward. This helps relieve the tension in the shoulder and upper back muscles.
- **Add some weight:** Take two filled water bottles or two books, and put one in each hand. With your arms starting at your sides, slowly lift the items up, holding your arms out to the sides. Hold for a few seconds and then lower slowly. Repeat this at least 10 times. This will strengthen your upper arms and shoulders.
- **Bicep curl:** Hold a filled water bottle in your hand. Sit up straight in your chair, and hold the bottle in your arm with your palm facing up. Curl your arm so the bottle goes to shoulder level. Repeat at least five times and then switch to the other arm. Even with the light weight of a water bottle, this will help strengthen biceps.
- **Rubberband stretch:** Get a large rubber or elastic band. Grab it with both hands, and pull it outward while stretching the arms.

Feet and Legs

- **Stand and stretch:** Get up from your chair at least every half hour to stretch or walk around. This will help prevent blood clots from developing in your legs. (Blood clots are very common among middle-aged workers who sit for long periods of time.)
- **Ankle rolls:** In a sitting position, lift each leg slightly and roll each ankle. This helps improve blood circulation and prevent the tingling, pins-and-needles feeling a person can get when blood circulation is cut off.
- **Raise your toes:** Keep your heels on the ground and lift your toes. This helps blood circulation to the feet. While it works well in a seated position, it works best if you can stand.
- **Calf stretches:** Put both legs in front of you while sitting. Lift your legs on the balls of the feet and set them down. Rest when your calves are tired, and then repeat after about 10 minutes. Do three repetitions to exercise the calf muscles.
- **Hip flexes:** While sitting in a chair, lift one foot slightly off the floor. Keep your knee bent in a 90-degree angle, and hold the position for as long as possible. This helps strengthen thigh muscles.

Neck

- **Neck rolls:** Drop your chin and slowly and carefully roll your neck. Raise the chin up and slowly bend your neck to each side, trying to touch your ear to your shoulder without raising your shoulder. This helps lessen tension and neck strain.
- **Just shrug:** Pull your shoulders up to your ears, and then release the tension and drop your shoulders. Do this at least three times to relieve tension in the shoulders and neck.

Torso

- **Get on the ball:** Purchase a large-size stability ball or stability ball-style desk chair. Sitting on it daily helps keep your back straight and abs firm.
- **Tone your abs:** While sitting, take a deep breath in, suck in your stomach, hold the position and then release slowly. Repeat a number of times.
- **Reverse stretch:** People who sit at a desk or work on a computer all day tend to hunch forward. Take time to counter that position with backward stretches. Open your arms wide, rotate your wrists so both thumbs point up and backward, and then pull your shoulders back. You should feel the muscles stretch in your shoulders and upper chest.
- **Twist:** Sit up straight and place your right arm behind your right hip. Twist to the right and hold. Do this again with your left arm and hip. You should feel the muscles on your sides and back stretch.

Resources

National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov

Exercising Without Equipment

To eliminate unwanted flab and tighten up your body, you don't need to go to a gym. Truth be told, you do not need any equipment. Your body is all you need. It is the ideal means to take you to peak health and fitness levels. To help you accomplish this goal, use this total body weight workout to burn fat, tone, increase strength and improve your overall health.

Starting This Program

Perform this program two to three times per week with at least one day (24 hours) of rest between workouts. When starting the program complete each exercise or stretch for the number of repetitions and sets listed resting between each set before moving to the next exercise. To increase the intensity of the program and burn more calories, perform this workout as a circuit, completing the prescribed number of repetitions of each exercise without resting. Once you've done one set of each exercise, rest for two minutes then repeat the entire circuit one or two more times.

Remember that you have to gradually add a challenging amount of weight in order to benefit from any strength exercise. If you do not challenge your muscles, you will not benefit from strength training. The exercises should feel somewhere between hard and very hard for you to lift or push the weight. It should not feel very, very hard. If you can not lift or push a weight 12 times in a row, it is too heavy for you for this exercise plan. Reduce the amount of weight. If you can lift more than 20 times in a row, it is too light for you. Increase the amount of weight.

Check with your doctor before you begin any type of exercise program.

Warm-up

Perform general cardiovascular warm-up five to ten minutes of aerobic exercise such as walking, jumping jacks or walking up and down the stairs. Then perform the prone cobra exercise and the horse stance horizontal exercise each one time then repeat the sequence one to two more times.

- Prone cobra – https://wellness1.guidanceresources.com/dt/exerciseplanner/pics/animations/prone_cobra.gif
- Lay face down arms at sides. Raise your body off the ground using your low back muscles and contracting your butt muscles. Once up use your low back to hold your body up, turn your arms outward and point the thumbs toward the sky. Squeeze your shoulder blades together. Keep your chin tucked and hold the position for 30 seconds or less, according to your ability, return to comfortable resting position.
- Horse stance horizontal – <https://wellness1.guidanceresources.com/dt/exerciseplanner/pics/animations/core103.gif>
- Start on all fours, hands under your shoulders, and hips at ninety degrees to your body. Bend your elbows until your body is parallel to the floor. Lift an arm out at a forty-five degree angle to your body thumb pointed up. Next, lift the opposite leg out until parallel to the floor. Hold for ten seconds and repeat with the opposite arm and leg.

Workout

Couple the exercises together in the order they are listed. Example, perform one set of squats then one set of lunges. Go back to the squats for the second set followed again by the lunge. Keep alternating the two exercises until the desired amount of sets are completed before moving onto the next two exercises.

Squat

- Stand feet shoulder width apart. Extend your arms in front of your body to help with balance. Bend your hips and knees to lower your body. Keep your heels on the floor and make sure that your knees are tracking over your feet. Do not round your low back. To go up, squeeze your butt muscles together and push your hips forward. Follow the same path when going down. Perform twelve to twenty repetitions.

Lunge

- Stand with feet hip width apart and take a big step forward. Lower your body allowing your back knee to almost touch the floor. Pause then come back up. In the bottom position your front leg shin should be perpendicular to the ground. If the knee of your front leg is coming out over the toes then step farther out. Your front knee should also be tracking over your front foot, do not allow it to fall in or out. Keep your body upright throughout the course of the movement. After completing the set switch legs. Perform 12 to 20 repetitions.

Push up

- Lay face down on the floor with hands resting under your shoulders. Push up with your arms lifting your body off the floor. You may move the hands slightly in any direction to make it more comfortable. Lower and repeat. Perform 12 to 20 repetitions.
- Glute bridge – <http://wellness1.guidanceresources.com/dt/exerciseplanner/pics/animations/core100.gif>
- Lay face up on your back with bent knees, feet flat on the floor and hip width apart. Contract stomach muscles to flatten your low back into the floor. Lift hips up off the floor. Avoid pushing hips too high and arch your back. Hold for a second then lower yourself back to the starting position. Perform 12 to 20 repetitions.

Front plank

- Lie on the floor face down with your elbows close to your sides and directly under your shoulders, palms down and fingers facing forward. Pull your belly button to your spine and hold. Slowly lift your body off the floor. Keep body and legs rigid. Do not allow your ribcage or low back to sink toward the floor. Avoid hips in the air and bending your knees. Keep your shoulders pushed down and away from your ears. Hold for five to 20 seconds while continuing to breathe normally. Slowly and gently lower your body back toward the floor. If you experience any pain in the low back, stop the exercise immediately.
- Turkish get up – <https://wellness1.guidanceresources.com/dt/exerciseplanner/pics/animations/core106.gif>
- Lay face up on the floor with a weight over your body with one arm. Straighten your elbow. Slowly stand up while keeping the weight vertical and your arm straight. Slowly reverse the motion. Keep your eyes on the weight at all times. If you begin to lose it drop the weight and get out of the way. Trying to salvage a botches lift is where injuries occur. Keep the weight light until you get the motion down. This is a tough exercise to master, but will be a favorite once you get the movement down pat. Perform 12 to 20 repetitions.

Cool-down

Perform all three exercises once then repeat the sequence one to two more times.

- Standing hamstring stretch – <https://wellness1.guidanceresources.com/dt/exerciseplanner/pics/animations/stretch18.jpg>
- Cross legs while standing, knees soft (slight bend), toes pointing straight ahead. Bend forward at your hips and touch toes. Hold 30 seconds.
- Kneeling superman reach
- Kneel down on the floor. Sit back moving your butt toward your heels with arms extending out in front of your body, elbows straight and palms pressing down into the floor. Feel mild tension through your upper arms and shoulders.
- Abdominal stretch – <https://wellness1.guidanceresources.com/dt/exerciseplanner/pics/animations/stretch15.jpg>
- Lie on the floor with your back straight. Stretch your toes forward while reaching hands and fingers above your head in the opposite direction. Hold for 30 seconds.

Home Abs Workouts

Many Americans struggle with weight gain, so companies market all kinds of gadgets they say are targeted to tone tummies. The reality, however, is that getting six-pack abs takes time, dedication and the right diet and exercise. Here are some tips to guide you.

Start Simply

One of the easiest ways to look slimmer is to improve your posture. When you stand up straight with your shoulders back and chest up, the abdominal muscles pull themselves in. Establish good posture on a daily basis by keeping your ears over your shoulders, shoulders over hips, hips over knees, and knees over ankles. As you stand and walk, keep your weight even on the balls and heels of your feet.

You can also do simple abdominal strengthening exercise when you are at work, doing chores or participating in other common activities. Just stand up straight and inhale to draw the navel to the spine. Hold it for a few seconds, exhale and repeat.

Ab Exercises Alone Will Not Reduce Belly Fat

Before being able to sculpt your abdominal muscles, you have to be able to see them. Eating a healthy diet and exercising more will help reduce your body fat. Keep your diet lean and stay away from overly processed foods. Talk with your doctor or medical care provider, and then start and adhere to an exercise routine.

Do Not Overdo Specific Exercises

Doing a thousand stomach crunches will not necessarily give you the six-pack look you are seeking. Experts recommend not training areas of the body in isolation. People should view the abs as part of their “core,” which includes the pelvis, lower back and hips. Experts recommend exercises that address all aspects of their core, not just the abs. Pilates is often recommended because all the abdominal muscles are worked (top, side and deep muscles) as well as the arms, legs, back muscles and glutes.

Exercise Correctly

Experts suggest slow, repetitive exercises and that people concentrate on working targeted muscle groups. Additionally, have variety in your workout so you do not become bored with your routine and stop exercising. Many exercises target the abdominal muscles:

- **Sit-ups:** Lie on your back with your hands crossed at the chest. Lift your upper body off the floor, keeping your chin up. Never jerk your body upwards as you lift yourself off the floor. As you begin to lie back, concentrate on your breathing and target your stomach muscles.
- **Basic crunch:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your knees bent and hands behind your head. Do not let your chin and chest touch as you lift your upper body off the floor using your upper back and shoulder blades.
- **Leg lift:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your hands flat to the floor, below your lower back. Keep your legs up straight so they are perpendicular to your upper body. Move them up and down, but not beyond a 45-degree angle. Do not lift your lower back off the floor or let your legs go all the way down to the floor.
- **Bicycle pump:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your hands under your head. Lift your upper body while twisting it towards the left and bring your right knee in. Then lift your upper body while twisting it toward the right and bring your left knee in. Remember to keep your lower back flat on the floor and the upper back curved in a C-shape.
- **Rowing:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your hands under your lower back. Bend your knees and bring them as close to your chest as possible. Lift your buttocks inward while keeping your back on the floor. Your hips should only reach a couple inches off the ground. Lower your hips until the top of your buttocks touches the floor.

- **Canoe twist:** Stand upright with your feet shoulder-width apart. Interlace your fingers to create a solid grip. Exhale and sweep your interlocked hands, arms, shoulders and chest to the left, as if you are rowing a canoe. Simultaneously lift your left knee up and to the right. Inhale and return to the starting position. Exhale and perform the movement to the right.
- **Front plank:** Start by lying face down. Place your elbows and forearms under your chest. Using your toes and forearms, prop yourself up to form a bridge. Maintain a flat back and do not allow your bottom to stick up into the air or your back to sag. Hold this position for 10 seconds to start and gradually increase the length of the hold.

As with other fitness routines, realize there are no fast fixes for sculpting abdominal muscles. Set reasonable goals for yourself and plan on slow and steady progression.

While it is not necessary to buy fancy equipment or hire a trainer, if you find that exercising on a fitness ball works better for you, use it. If you think you need the motivation or expertise of a trainer, hire one to help you reach your goals.

Resources

National Institutes of Health (NIH): www.nih.gov

What exercises or techniques can I use to help cope with stress?

Try these exercises the next time you feel stressed out:

- **Deep breathing.** Drawing slow, deep breaths from the diaphragm promotes a more efficient exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide than chest or shoulder breathing. Exhale slowly and evenly. If you are highly stressed, try this while lying on your back. You also can try body-focus breathing: take a deep breath and close your eyes; sense where your body is contacting the environment around you. Take another deep breath, and move your body to get more comfortable and relaxed.
- **Yoga and stretching exercises.** These can relieve tension, make your body more limber and flexible and produce an overall calming effect.
- **Meditation and imagery techniques.** Sitting in a comfortable, quiet environment, closing your eyes and freeing your mind from its many concerns for a few minutes each day can help you achieve relaxation quickly. Try concentrating on an image that symbolizes your stress, such as a giant ball that slowly begins to shrink, or let your mind go blank.
- **Progressive muscle-relaxation techniques.** These involve systematically visualizing, tensing and relaxing each major muscle group. For example, make a fist, and hold it tight for at least five seconds. Feel the tension in your hand and arm. Finally, relax your hand, and visualize the tension escaping your body. Do the same with your other hand, your neck, your face, limbs, etc.
- **Head and neck massage.** Starting at your temples and forehead, use your fingers to massage your head, neck, eyelids, forehead, temples and scalp.

Resources

National Institutes of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html